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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2010

Draft report

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VI. Documentation and publication-related matters

Introduction and overview

1. At its 507th meeting, on 30 August 2010, the Committee on Conferences considered section IV of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, concerning matters related to documentation and publication (see A/65/122, paras. 35-47 and annexes VII and VIII) and the internal printing of parliamentary documents (para. 48 and annex IX). Significant progress had been made in ensuring the timely submission and issuance of documents in New York in a timely manner, including for the Fifth Committee. A decision had been taken to formally implement proactive documents management, namely the slotting system, at all four duty stations, on the basis of the positive results achieved at Headquarters. Late submission of documents and inputs by Member States, however, was impeding further improvement of the timely availability of documents.

Discussion

2. A number of delegations sought clarification on the proposed recommendation to the General Assembly contained in paragraph 40 of the report of the Secretary-General and requested further information on the measures taken since February 2010 to improve the timely submission of documents. It was suggested that a system of alerts to signal the late status of any slotted documents would help management identify potential problems and take action where needed. A more detailed explanation was requested for the problems encountered regarding the processing of documents for the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Delegations also wished to know what steps had been taken to address the poor ratings observed in the client satisfaction e-survey referred to in annex VI of the report of the Secretary-General.

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3. Additional information was requested on the pilot project for slotting reports to be considered by the Security Council. A comprehensive update was also requested on the implementation of all the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (see A/64/166). Several delegations requested further details on the measurement of document length in words rather than in pages, including the merits thereof.

4. A representative of the Secretariat said that, in addition to the mechanisms of accountability outlined in the Secretary-General's report, submitting departments received reminders on a weekly basis to submit pending documents in a timely fashion and the secretaries and bureaux of bodies awaiting documentation were kept informed of the status of their documentation and given the opportunity to provide feedback on timely submission prior to the beginning of a session. The interdepartmental task force on documentation for the Fifth Committee also continued to hold meetings. Late submissions by Member States were a recurrent issue and directly influenced the performance rates of the Secretariat since a considerable number of reports by the Secretary-General were, in fact, compilations of inputs from Member States or straight submissions by Member States. The list of departments that had consistently failed to achieve the benchmark of 90 per cent timely submission was provided in writing.

5. Regarding the rating of "poor" (6 per cent of participants) received through the e-survey of conference services provided by the Department, the Committee was informed that steps planned or already taken to remedy problems relating to access to the meetings calendar, the electronic board and the *Journal of the United Nations* included placing a direct link to the meetings calendar in e-Meets 2.0 and improving the user-friendliness and availability of the *Journal* through Google, Twitter and Facebook. Additional suggestions from Member States would be welcome.

6. While most reports to be considered by the Security Council were highly unpredictable in terms of submission time frames, a recent analysis had shown that a considerable number were recurrent in nature and could, as such, be considered candidates for the slotting system, thus ensuring that they would become available to Member States in a more timely fashion, and thus enhance predictability for planning purposes. The pilot project had only just begun and the Department was working closely with the Security Council secretariat to ensure its success.

7. Shifting from page limits to word counts would help to eliminate confusion by establishing one standard for the length of documents to be submitted and processed. Based on the standard of approximately 530 words per page, 16-page reports were considered equivalent to 8,500 words, 20-page reports to 10,700 words and 32-page reports to 17,000 words.